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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001042

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2021
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: CONCERN OVER U.S. POLICY UNDERMINES
SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. IN SE REGION

Classified by Consulate Adana Principal Officer W. Scott
Reid, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This message is from AmConsulate Adana.

12. (C) Summary: During a recent visit to Diyarbakir and Sanliurfa in southeast Turkey, many of our interlocutors expressed concerns about the recent Danish cartoon issue and U.S. Middle East policy. Even our more moderate contacts who tend to be supportive of U.S. efforts in the region, expressed grave concerns about the perceived failure of U.S. policy to bring stability and peace to the region, and the consequent undermining of confidence in U.S. ability to bring about lasting change in Turkey,s southeast, Iraq and the broader Middle East region. End Summary.

13. (C) Former International Visitor participant, Robert Kennedy Award Winner and Diyarbakir Human Rights Foundation President Sezgin Tanrikulu was grateful for overall U.S. efforts in the region, but worried that the recent re-publication in the press of additional Abu Gharib photographs, along with the negative mood stemming from the Danish cartoons, harmed U.S. credibility with Muslims, and undermined the confidence of the Turkish public that the U.S. could succeed in bringing democracy to the region. He agreed with other contacts that the U.S. has a serious image problem which would affect negatively our ability to improve the human rights situation in Turkey and elsewhere.

14. (C) Recently elected President of the Sanliurfa chapter of Mazlum-Der (a Muslim human rights NGO, historically critical of the U.S., which champions rights for devout Kurds) Mustafa Arisut, was more forceful in his condemnation of U.S. policy. Arisut believes the U.S. practices a double standard in its policies throughout the region. (Note: this was a common accusation we heard from many of our contacts from Adana to Sanliurfa. End note.) Arisut said that Muslims do not believe that the U.S. is serious about human rights when it allegedly allows instances of torture, such as those revealed by the Abu Gharib photos and recent allegations concerning U.S. activities at the Guantanamo detainee facility. We explained U.S. policy against torture and emphasized that perpetrators of such activities had been prosecuted.

15. (C) Arisut charged that the U.S. stance against Iran,s nuclear program was further evidence of a U.S. double standard, since it did not likewise condemn Israel,s nuclear weapons program. We explained that the U.S. supported multinational efforts to peacefully convince Iran, whose President had recently made public threats to destroy Israel,

to meet its NPT commitments in order to avoid possible nuclear conflagration in the region. We further explained that Israel had a democratically accountable government controlling its national security strategy. Arisut further charged that the EU practices a double standard when it espouses freedom of religion and expression but allowed the European Court of Human Rights to uphold laws against the wearing of headscarves in public schools and government controlled spaces. (Note: This is a comment reflected to us by Kahramanmaraş AK party leaders recently as well. End note.)

¶6. (C) Arisut emphasized that Turkey could not remain indifferent to developments in the region, especially in regards to U.S. attempts to cease financial support for the democratically elected Hamas party in Palestine. Arisut claimed that most of Turkey's Muslims supported the GOT's recent reception of a Hamas representative in Ankara. He added that the U.S. attempt to undermine support for a democratically-elected party in Palestine created doubts in the minds of many Muslims about the utility and effectiveness of democracy as a solution to Turkey's problems, and about U.S. commitment to democracy in the region. We explained that the U.S. regards Hamas as a terrorist organization and does not finance such groups. We further explained that Hamas needs to renounce violence, accept the right of Israel to exist as a state, acknowledge the legitimacy of prior PA agreements, and promise to uphold international standards of democratic behavior to bolster its international legitimacy.

¶7. (C) Striking a more moderate tone, but no less concerned about the issues, business contacts were sincerely looking for solutions to problems that divide Turks. Sanliurfa MUSIAD (Muslim Business Association) President Abdulkadir Canpolat told us that he supported the U.S. position regarding the Danish cartoons in that the cartoons were

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reprehensible in their disrespect of Islam, but should not be used as an excuse for violence or to restrain freedom of expression. He added that his organization's members were seeking a greater U.S. role in mediating between the PKK and the GOT to find a peaceful and democratic solution to problems in the southeast. He emphasized that Kurds in the region believed that it was not too much to ask for open expression of Kurdish cultural identity through expanded language rights, lowering the election threshold to well below the current 10 percent, and allowing a general amnesty for PKK members who would renounce violence. Canpolat said that Kurdish village guards are represented by their mainstream Turkish party counterparts, while other Kurds who support the GOT can be represented through Kurdish membership in the ruling AKP, but that the majority of Kurds, who do not support any current national level political party, are not allowed a voice in parliament.

Comment

¶8. (C) We were struck by the deep level of concern over U.S. policy in the region among all levels of our contacts in southeast Turkey. The contacts we talked to were eager to ask us about U.S. policy, and expressed their concerns and disagreements without any prompting. These issues were clearly foremost in every contact's mind. The U.S. image problem regarding democracy building in the region, as well as perceptions of U.S. double standards towards justice and human rights for Muslims, are widespread in Turkey's southeast. Most importantly, such perceptions are undermining confidence among our supporters in southeast Turkey as to the U.S. ability to champion human rights and build democratic institutions in Turkey as well as the broader Middle East region.

WILSON